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Bazaar Diplomacy

TURKEY NOW SAYS that before letting American U2 reconnaissance planes into its airspace to help verify Soviet compliance with a new SALT treaty, it must ask Moscow's approval. On the face of it, this is startling behavior for an ally and fellow NATO member that presumably benefits from the greater stability and security being pursued in SALT. When you look more closely, however, it is confirming evidence that relations between the United States and its longtime partner in the eastern Mediterranean are in a state of near crisis. That is why diplomacy between them has become a matter of the bazaar.

The Turks are in a terrible state. World economic conditions have aggravated the pains of modernization to a point where they need prompt and massive infusions of outside aid to stay upright now and to put their economy on a strong longterm basis. To get the aid, however, they are being asked to accept the usual painful terms that international creditors, even friendly ones, enforce upon hard-pressed debtors. At the same time they are being asked, in regard to the vexing Cyprus question, for concessions that are entirely justifiable and even minimal in terms of Cyprus itself but which are offensive to Turkish nationalism, especially in its currently inflamed state.

The Turks are being asked to do all this while dealing with internal tensions of the most savage sort, and continuing to rule themselves by democratic means.

It is, then, unsurprising that Turkey is showing signs of the strain. This is most evident in its use of its strategic assets for bargaining with the United States. In truth, these assets are considerable: the airspace in which U2s could fly, the four sites used for ground-based SALT-monitoring facilities, the NATO bases, Turkey's very loyalty to and membership in the Western alliance. The Turkish government wants various forms of economic and military cooperation, plus political reassurances and the satisfaction of being treated as a sovereign equal. It is not only a very expensive proposition but a politically delicate one as well.

And it is worth it. The Turks are difficult but they have shown by 30 years of security cooperation and by their efforts to maintain a democracy that they are very much a part of the West. If Turkish-American diplomacy borrows heavily from the ways of the bazaar, then it is not a bad idea to have relations based on mutual and hardheaded notions of self-interest. It is hard to exaggerate how trying the effort to keep the relationship on the track will be, but it is an effort that—on both sides—must be made.